



October 29, 2004

The Honorable Larry Phillips
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Phillips:

Pursuant to the September 7, 2004 request of the Metropolitan King County Council, enclosed for your consideration and adoption are proposed policies for the siting of temporary emergency encampments, a motion to adopt those policies, and an ordinance creating a new temporary use permit for homeless encampments. The proposed policies build upon the work and final report of the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Homeless Encampments (CACHE), submitted to the Council on August 13, 2004.

The 22-member CACHE was formally established on June 14, 2004 by the county council to explore issues of homelessness and the employment of emergency encampments as temporary shelters, following a divisive discussion on these issues in the Bothell community after a homeless encampment was established there in May. As stipulated in the establishing ordinance, each councilmember was encouraged to forward names of possible appointees to represent their council districts, and in every case I proposed for nomination the names given to me by the 13 councilmembers. The other nominees were chosen to represent a particular constituency, e.g., the faith community, or area of expertise, e.g., homeless services provider, as required in the ordinance. In total, as per the council directive, there were 18 voting and four advisory members and all were confirmed unanimously.

The final commission proved to be a diverse group of individuals with a broad mix of experience and knowledge of homeless issues and homelessness in King County. It also demonstrated a broad range of opinions with regard to the role of government in housing and homeless services, with a minority holding the strong opinion that government should play no role whatsoever in emergency housing. The CACHE was strengthened by the breadth of opinions expressed at its meetings.

CACHE was charged with developing recommendations on four specific topics:

1. A needs assessment for homeless encampments.
2. Policy and procedural guidelines for determining the location of future homeless encampments.
3. Options for locating homeless encampments on public land in King County.
4. Options for locating homeless encampments on private land in King County.

The CACHE held seven meetings, including two community meetings, and completed its work as directed. Particular effort was made in the final deliberations to incorporate the opinions of all participants into the final report, and, worked to ensure that all majority and minority motions were included with vote totals. In the end, all voting members and advisory members signed and submitted the final CACHE report.

On September 7, 2004, co-chairs Holly Plackett and Bill Kirlin-Hackett briefed the Committee of the Whole on the commission's findings and recommendations. At that time, two other members of the CACHE also spoke to the council, calling out areas within the report where the membership did not reach consensus.

Later that same day, the council passed motion 2004-0432 accepting the CACHE final report and calling for the executive to submit for council review and approval proposed policies for siting and permitting homeless encampments, noting what agencies will be responsible for implementation and what costs and impacts these agencies project.

The enclosed documents and this letter respond to that request. Staff conducted a thorough review of the recommendations of the CACHE report, the "dissenting report", the consent decree developed by the City of Seattle pertaining to tent cities, the City of Bothell permit negotiated for Tent City 4, and the City of Woodinville permit for Tent City 4. Specific policies with regard to siting and community notification are addressed in the enclosures, as well as proposed revisions to King County zoning code to create a new temporary use permit specifically for use with emergency homeless encampments.

The drafting committee included representatives from the Department of Community and Human Services, the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, the Suburban Cities (City of Kent and City of Federal Way) and A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), which serves 15 member cities in East King County. Although the enclosed proposed policies are specific to King County, these partners were interested in participating and collaborating on terms and conditions that might be applicable universally for other municipalities where emergency encampments might be proposed in the future. Major Robin Fenton of the King County Sheriff's Office assisted with the law enforcement section. Staff from the King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDes) and the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office also provided input and assistance.

The proposed policies refer specifically to permitting homeless encampments with the non-profit organization known as SHARE/WHEEL – the Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) and its sister organization, the Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL).

At this time, SHARE/WHEEL is the only non-profit organizing and operating tent cities, in addition to overseeing more than a dozen other homeless shelters. No other homeless advocacy or non-profit organization has expressed an interest in providing this type of service.

The drafting committee concurs with the CACHE in favoring the use of private land over public land, in recognition of the valuable role of the sponsoring organization in creating community connections, and fostering community services and support for a tent city. It is more difficult to facilitate this when the sponsoring organization is not a member of the immediate neighborhood. In the event county land is proposed, the policies recommend the identification of a sponsoring organization to join in the permit application and to provide or coordinate support services for the encampment.

The drafting committee also reviewed and discussed the issue of siting temporary emergency homeless encampments in proximity to schools and daycares, an issue for some residents voicing opposition to tent cities. I have also reviewed this information, along with reports from local law enforcement in the many cities that have hosted tent cities near schools and playgrounds. I am in agreement with the CACHE majority opinion and the drafting committee in finding that there is no evidence to support the fear that the residents of these encampments are inherently a threat to children. As has been the case at previous locations, I would hope parents, school administrators, and the tent city sponsoring organization could work together to address safety issues as a community if a homeless encampment is temporarily moving into the area. It is important to teach ongoing messages of “stranger danger” to children, whether that stranger emerges from a \$500,000 home or a tent. It is equally important to teach our children messages of compassion, as expressed so well by Kelly Aramaki, Principal of Maywood Elementary near Bothell’s Tent City 4 who wrote in a letter to parents that “we have decided to view this as an opportunity to teach our students something no math curriculum, science experiment, or spelling test could ever teach – and that is compassion, caring for those in need, understanding the problem of homelessness, how to treat all people with respect and dignity, and reserving judgment until we’ve had the chance to walk in another person’s shoes.”

The proposed policies I am forwarding address siting requirements with regard to buffers and other considerations, limitations on enrollment and length of stay and also provide suggested community notification and public meeting requirements.

The enclosed ordinance identifies the temporary use permit process for homeless encampments. These provisions reflect the land use policies articulated in the attached policy document and would apply to proposed homeless encampments located in unincorporated King County. The proposed temporary use permit would allow for homeless encampments up to 90 days provided that certain public notification and siting requirements were met.

The following departments may/will have a role in the event homeless encampments are established on county land and/or land in unincorporated King County:

- Permitting - Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES).
- Public health and environmental safety – Seattle-King County Department of Public Health.

- Public safety - King County Sheriff's Office.
- Coordination - Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS).

King County does not project significant costs associated with the establishment of temporary emergency encampments. The non-profit organizer, SHARE/WHEEL, assumes the costs of portable toilets, portable hand-washing stations, garbage removal and other services, often with the assistance of the sponsoring organization. The only projected county expense may be some grading or gravel for entrances to an encampment on undeveloped county land and waiving of permit fees. Staff time for the departments would not be beyond that which is already included in job descriptions with regard to ongoing support to the homeless, processing of permits, etc. No more than \$10,000 expense is projected at any one county-owned site.

The motion also requests recommendations for how the county will take significant steps to reduce homelessness, with particular emphasis on those vulnerable populations for which the county has service responsibilities. These recommendations will be developed and presented to the council early in the new year as we begin our efforts to begin to plan for the implementation of the ten year plan to end homelessness in King County being developed by the countywide Committee to End Homelessness. King County is proud to have been a founder of that effort, and very pleased to have been chosen by that committee to provide the regional coordination for its implementation beginning January 2005.

I am committed to working to end homelessness in King County. As I have stated many times, tent cities are not a permanent solution to homelessness. I am in complete agreement with the CACHE that the scope of homelessness and its causes are large and complex, and that any effort to truly solve homelessness must address the need to ensure access to necessary treatment and support services. We also agree that we do not have adequate affordable and accessible housing in King County. That is where I intend to focus my efforts over the next several years, working with our many partners in state and local government, housing developers, and the faith community to create more housing for low-median income citizens. King County must not become a place where only the wealthy can afford to live.

This will take a great deal of effort and energy, but I am committed to working to lead that effort. Until we can create the bricks and mortar, tent cities provide an emergency, short-term housing option for people currently living on the streets. While far from ideal, it is infinitely better to live 90 days in a tent than to live one night under a bridge. Homeless encampments provide a community for up to 100 people, and the opportunity to create at least a temporary home base from which to seek and maintain employment, regain some measure of stability and rebuild resources. Together with SHARE/WHEEL, sponsoring organizations, the faith community, community organizations and local law enforcement, we can work together to address the concerns of the local communities and employ this temporary solution to our gaps in available shelter and permanent housing in ways that help the homeless but also preserve the safety of our neighborhoods.

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October 29, 2004

Page 5

Please feel free to contact Kurt Triplett, Chief of Staff, (206) 296-4002, or Jackie MacLean, Director, Department of Community and Human Services, (206) 296-7689, with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Ron Sims

King County Executive

Enclosures

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Scott White, Chief of Staff

Shelley Sutton, Policy Staff Director

Rebecha Cusack, Lead Staff, BFM Committee

Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

Kurt Triplett, Chief of Staff, Executive Office

Sheryl V. Whitney, Assistant King County Executive

Steve Call, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Paul Tanaka, County Administrative Officer, Department of Executive Services

Dr. Alonso Plough, Director, Seattle-King County Department of Public Health

Pam Bissonnette, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks

Harold S. Taniguchi, Director, Department of Transportation

Jackie MacLean, Director, Department of Community and Human Services

Stephanie Warden, Director, Department of Development and Environmental Services

The Honorable David Reichert, King County Sheriff